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Chu

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(54) **INJECTING AN RF LOCAL OSCILLATOR SIGNAL INTO AN AVALANCHE PHOTO DIODE USING PHOTONS EMITTED FROM A LIGHT EMITTING DIODE**

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G01S 7/497 (2006.01)

G01S 7/4861 (2020.01)

G01S 17/36 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **G01S 7/497** (2013.01); **G01S 7/4861** (2013.01); **G01S 17/36** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC G01S 7/497; G01S 7/4861; G01S 17/36
See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present disclosure generally relates to laser range finders. In one embodiment, a shallow-trench isolation diode operates in a reverse-biased mode. In another embodiment, a poly-defined diode operates in a forward-biased mode. In both embodiments, the diode emits photons in response to a radio frequency current, and the photons are received by an avalanche photo diode during a calibration process.

3 Claims, 17 Drawing Sheets

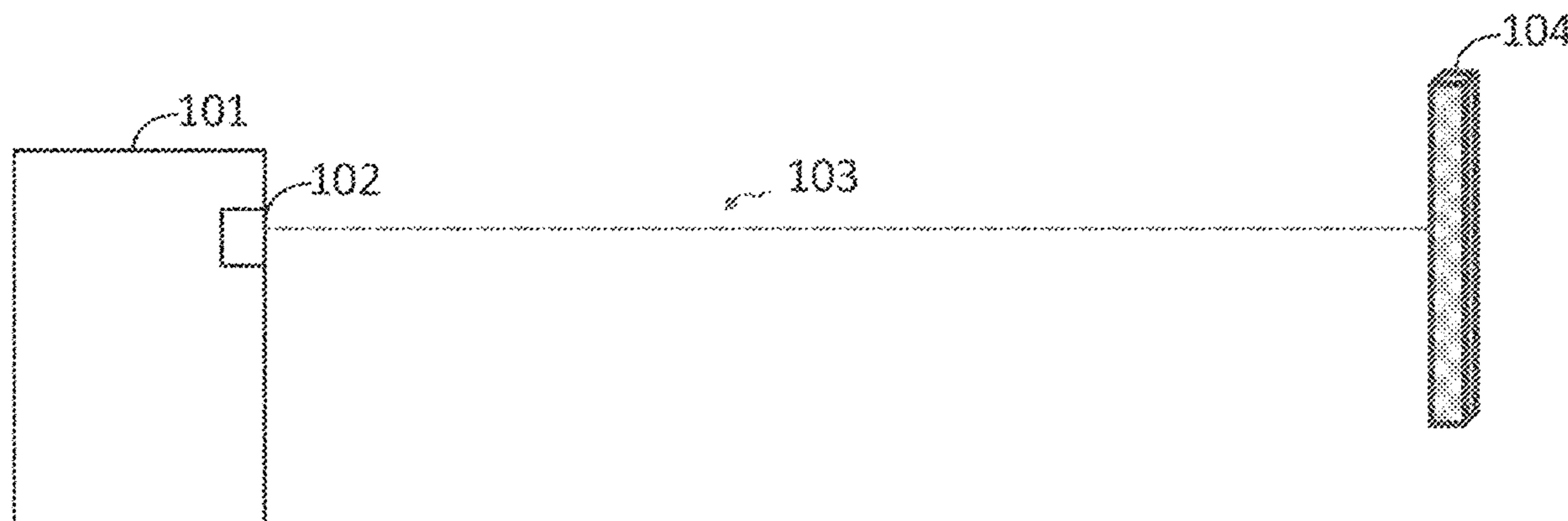


FIG. 1

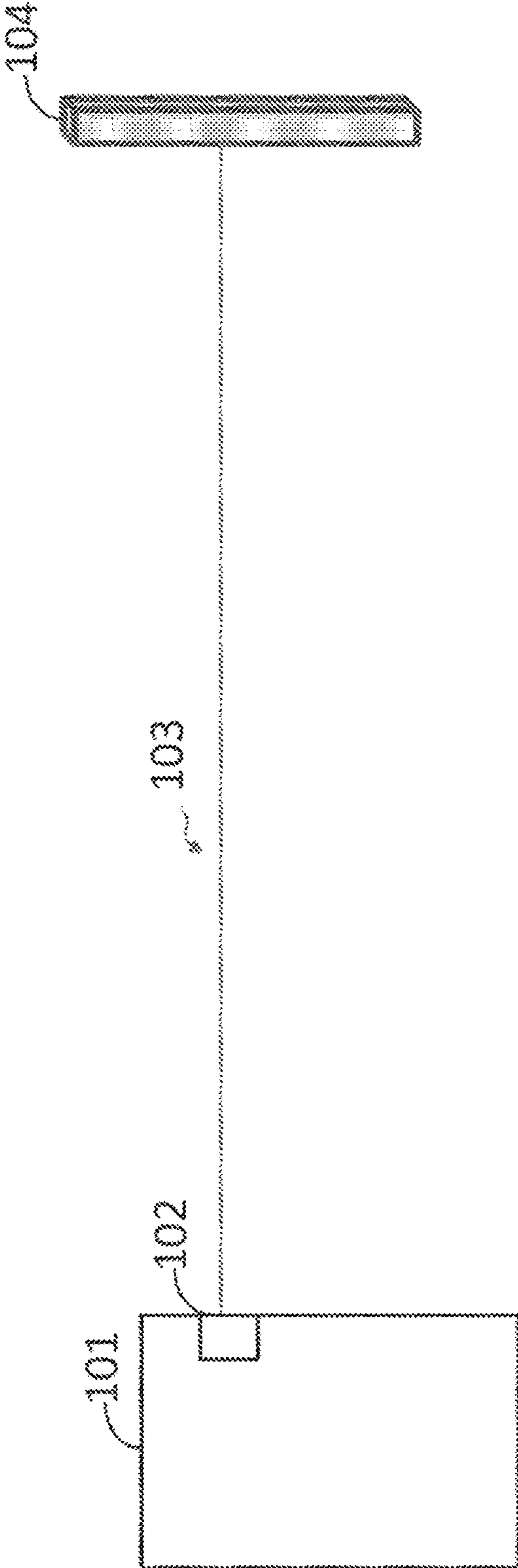


FIG. 2

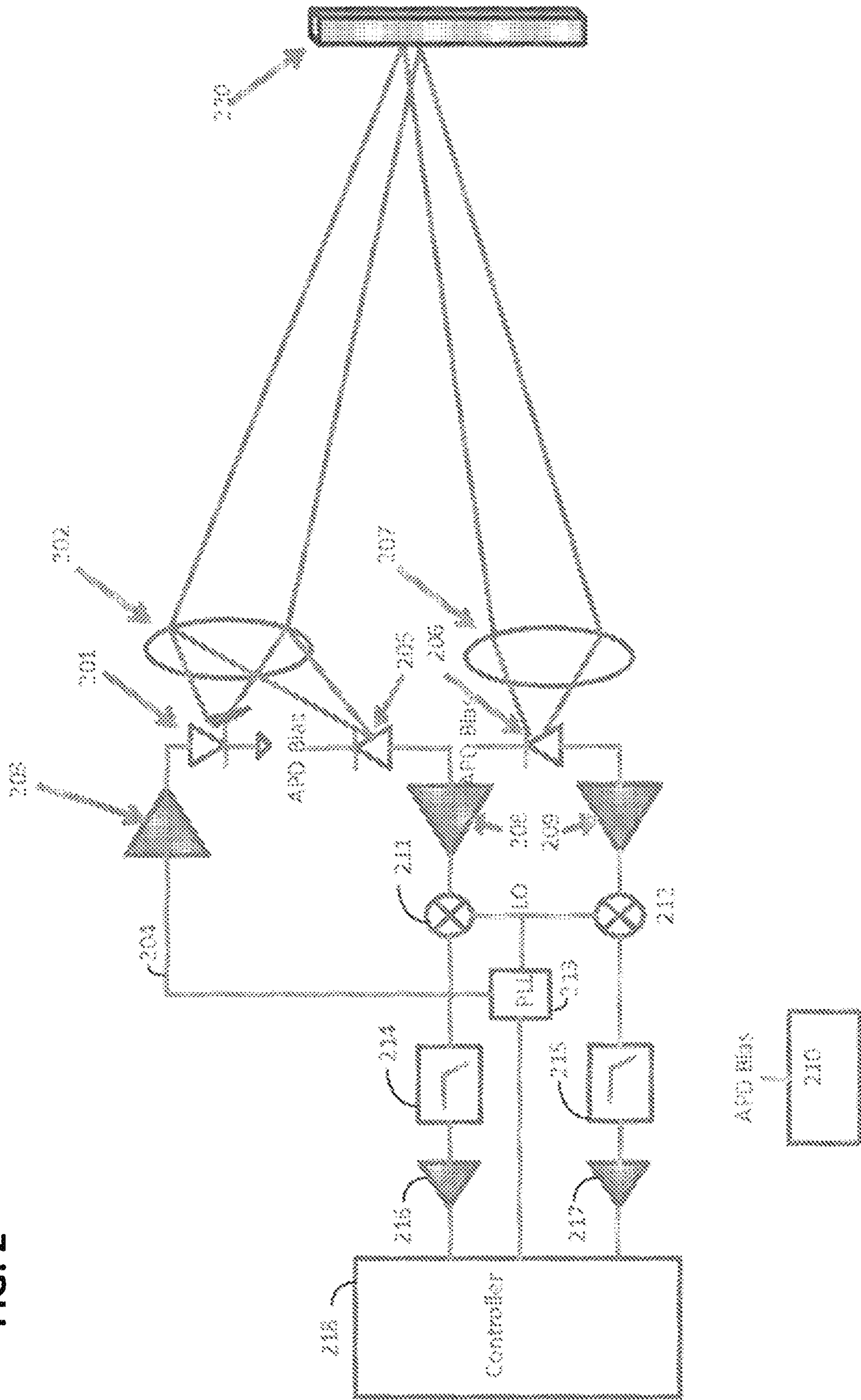


FIG. 3

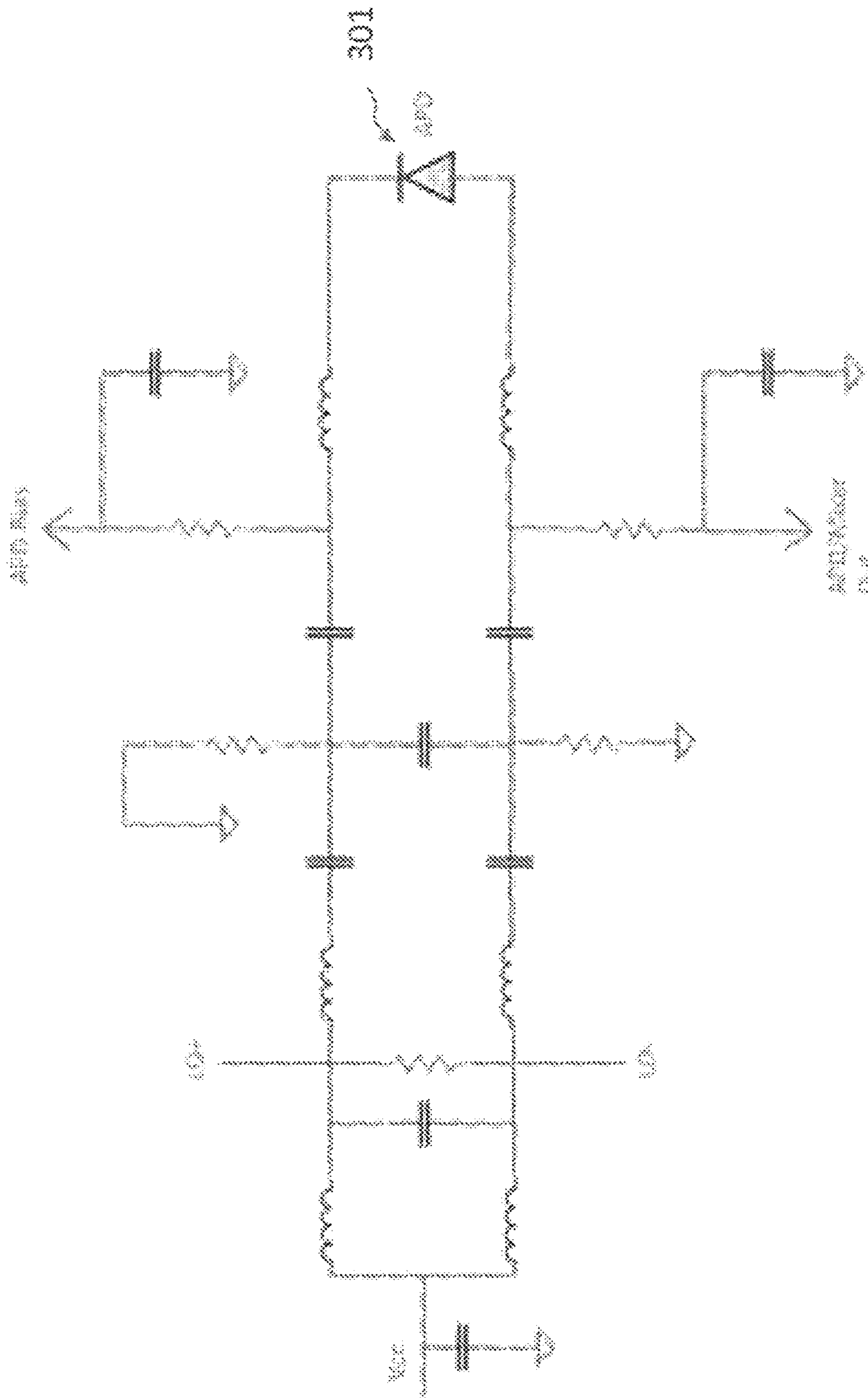


FIG. 4

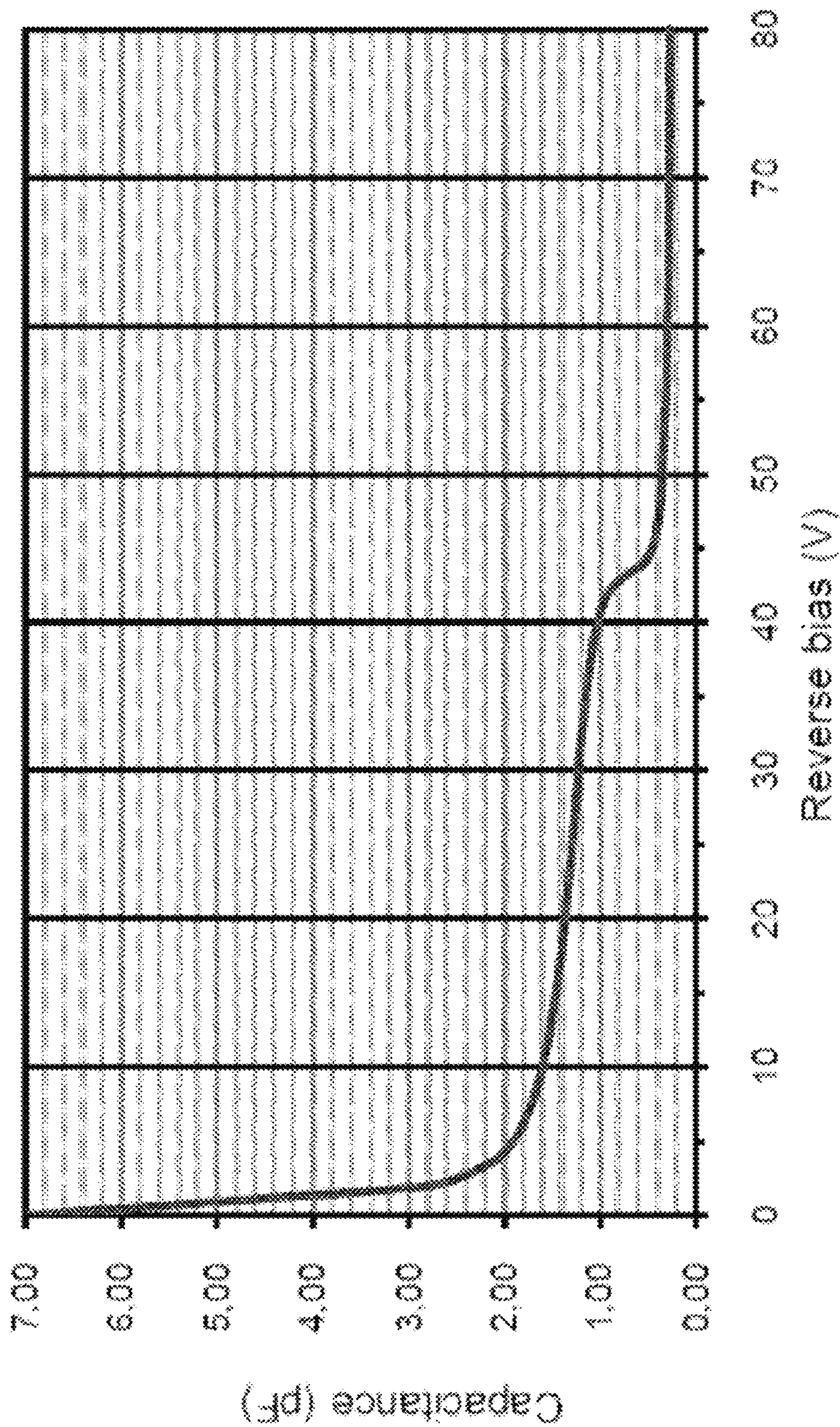


FIG. 5

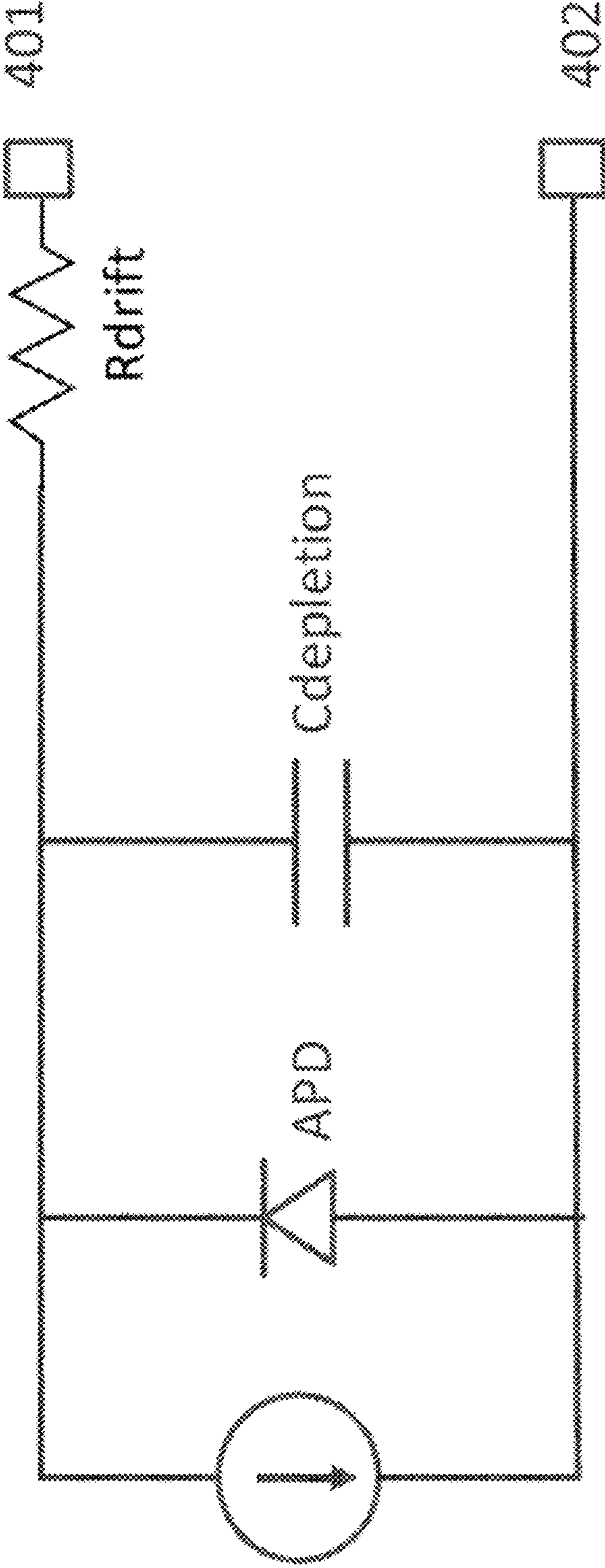


FIG. 6

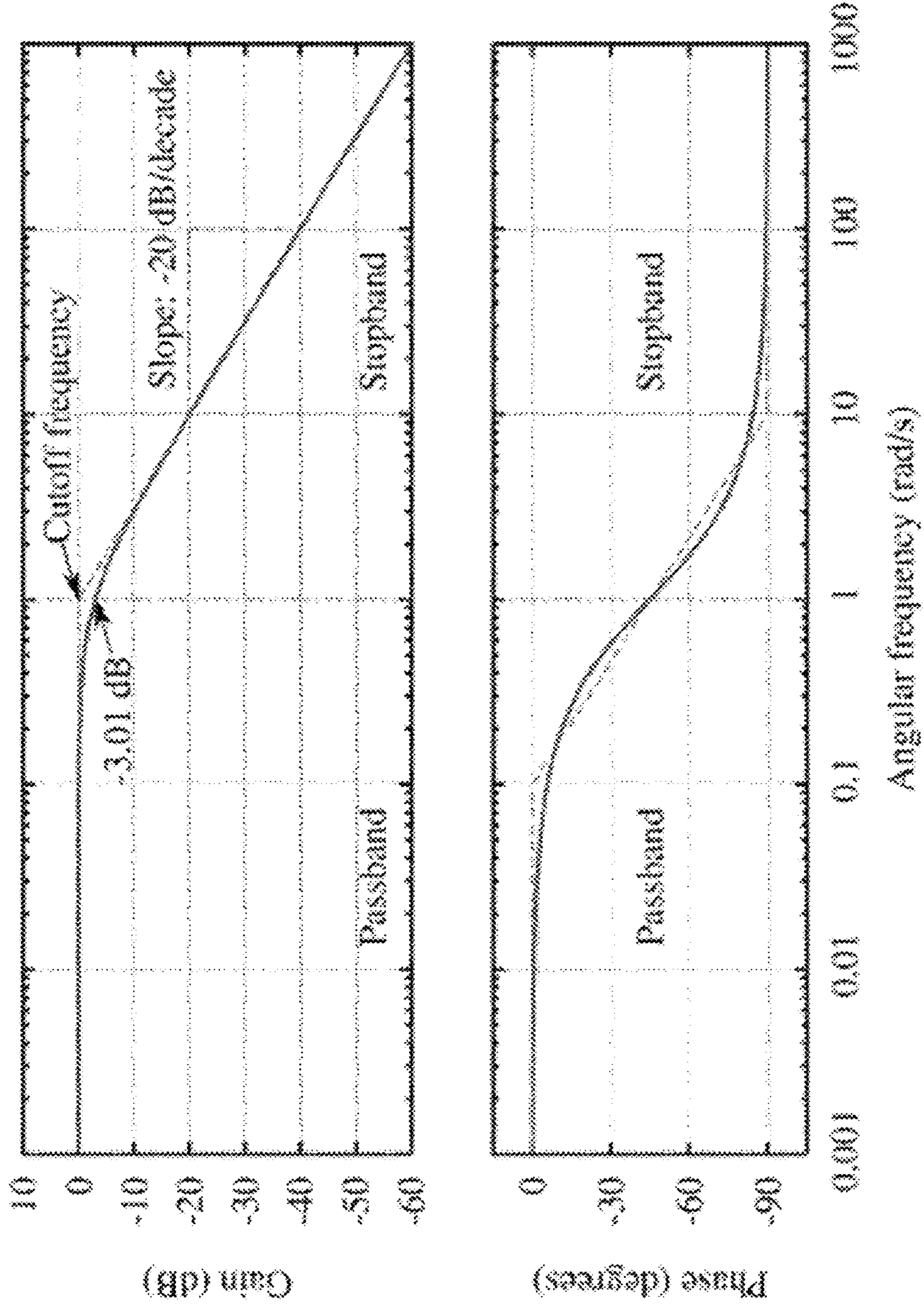


FIG. 7

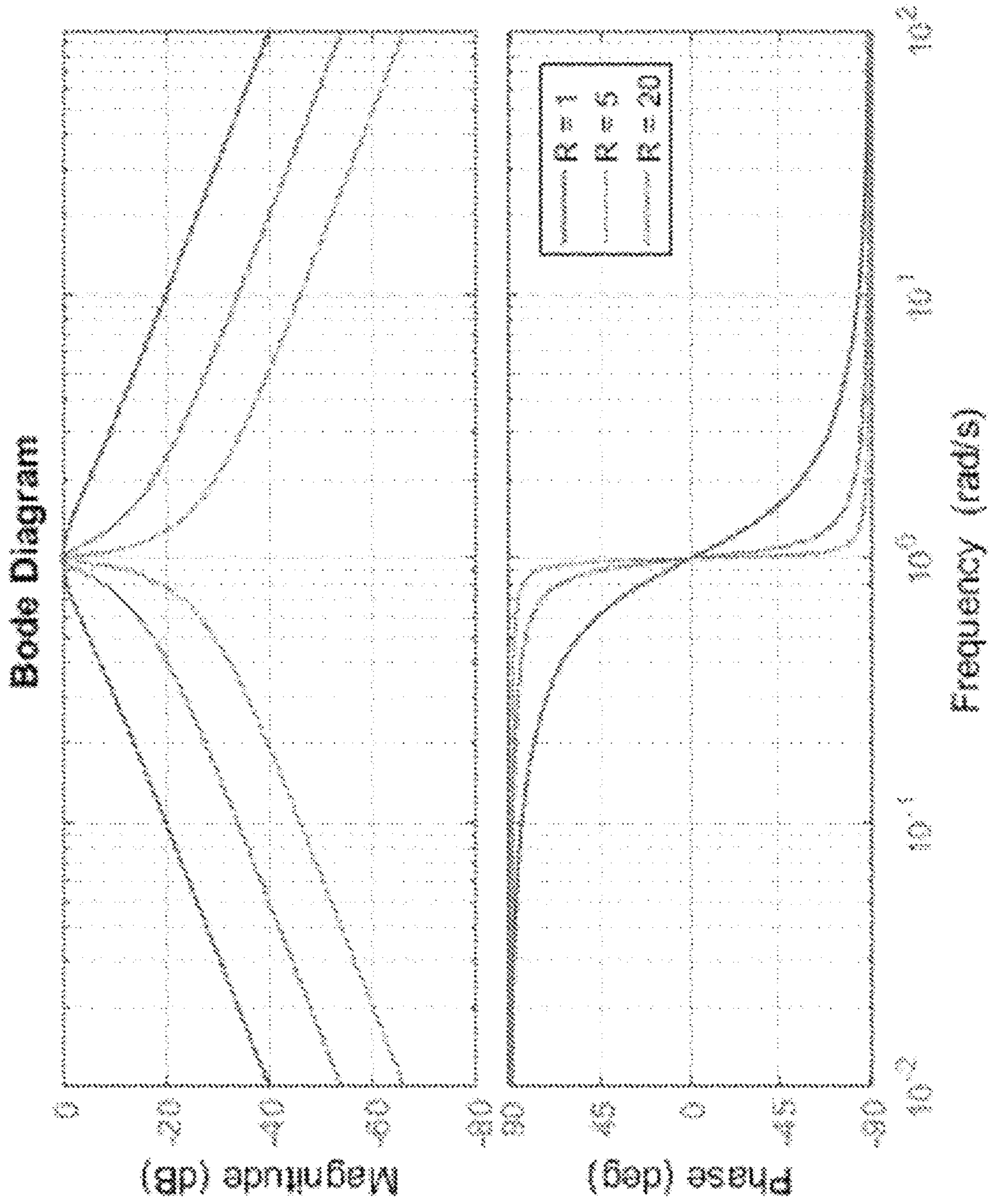
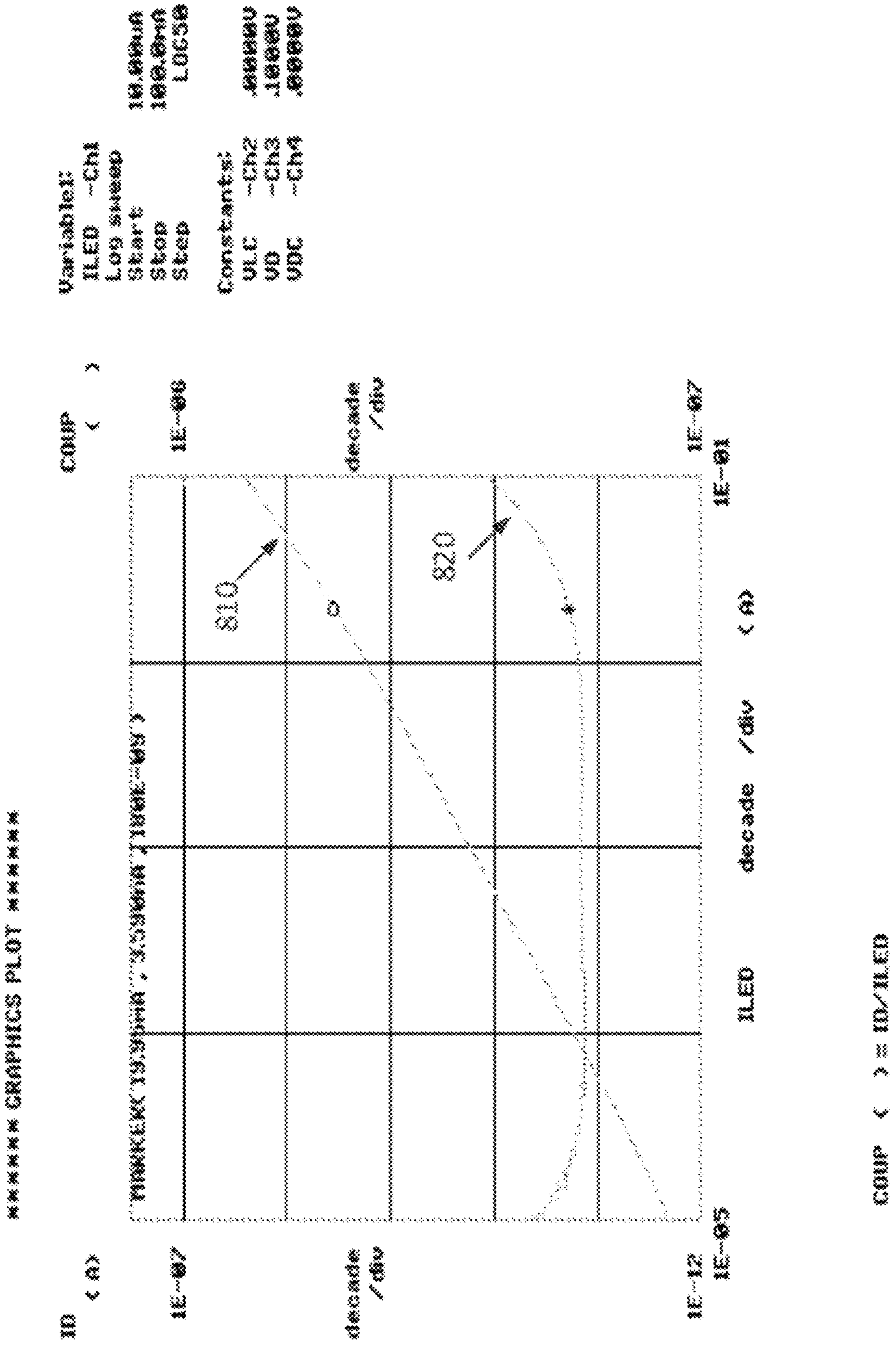


FIG. 8



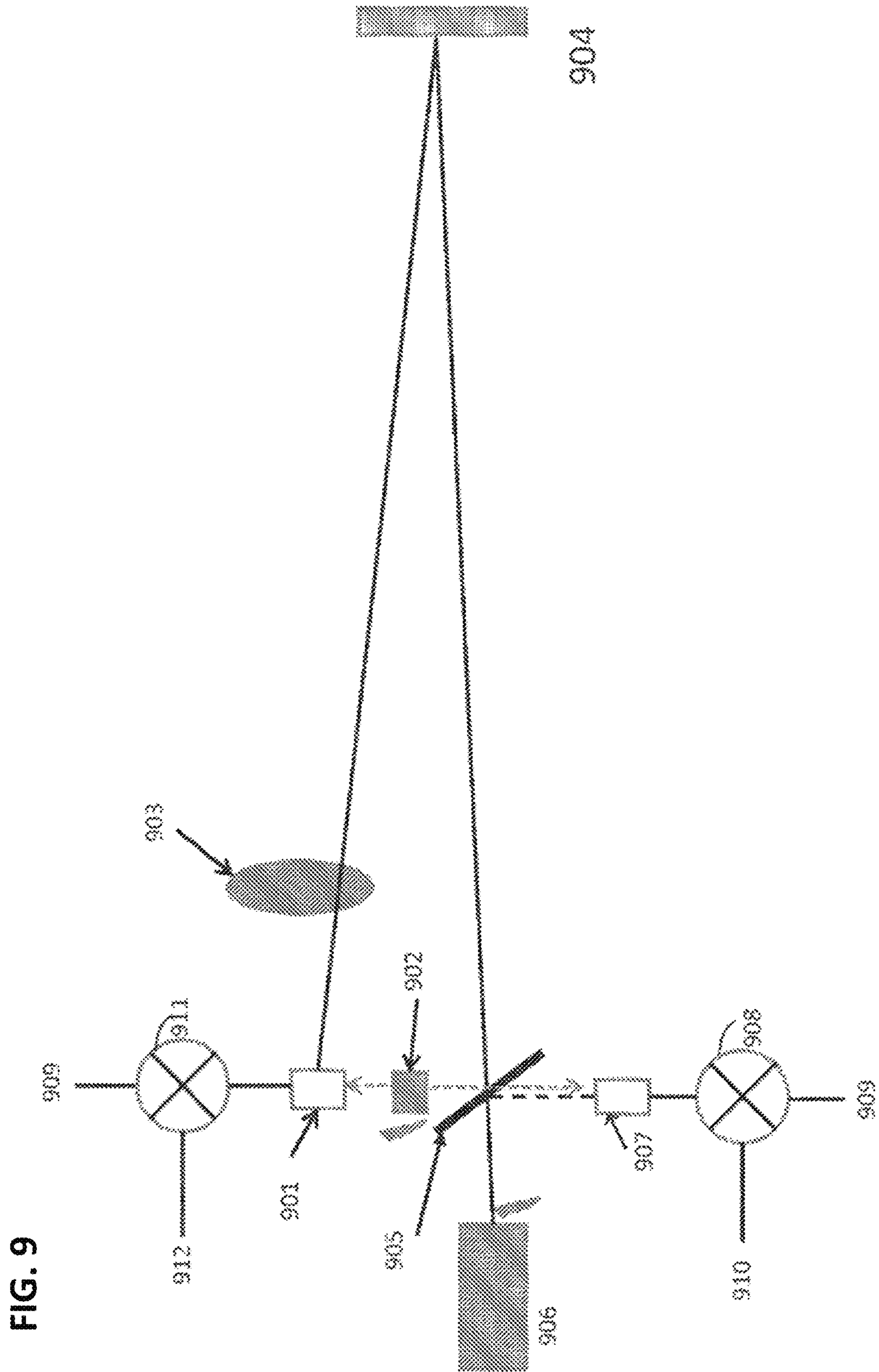


FIG. 9

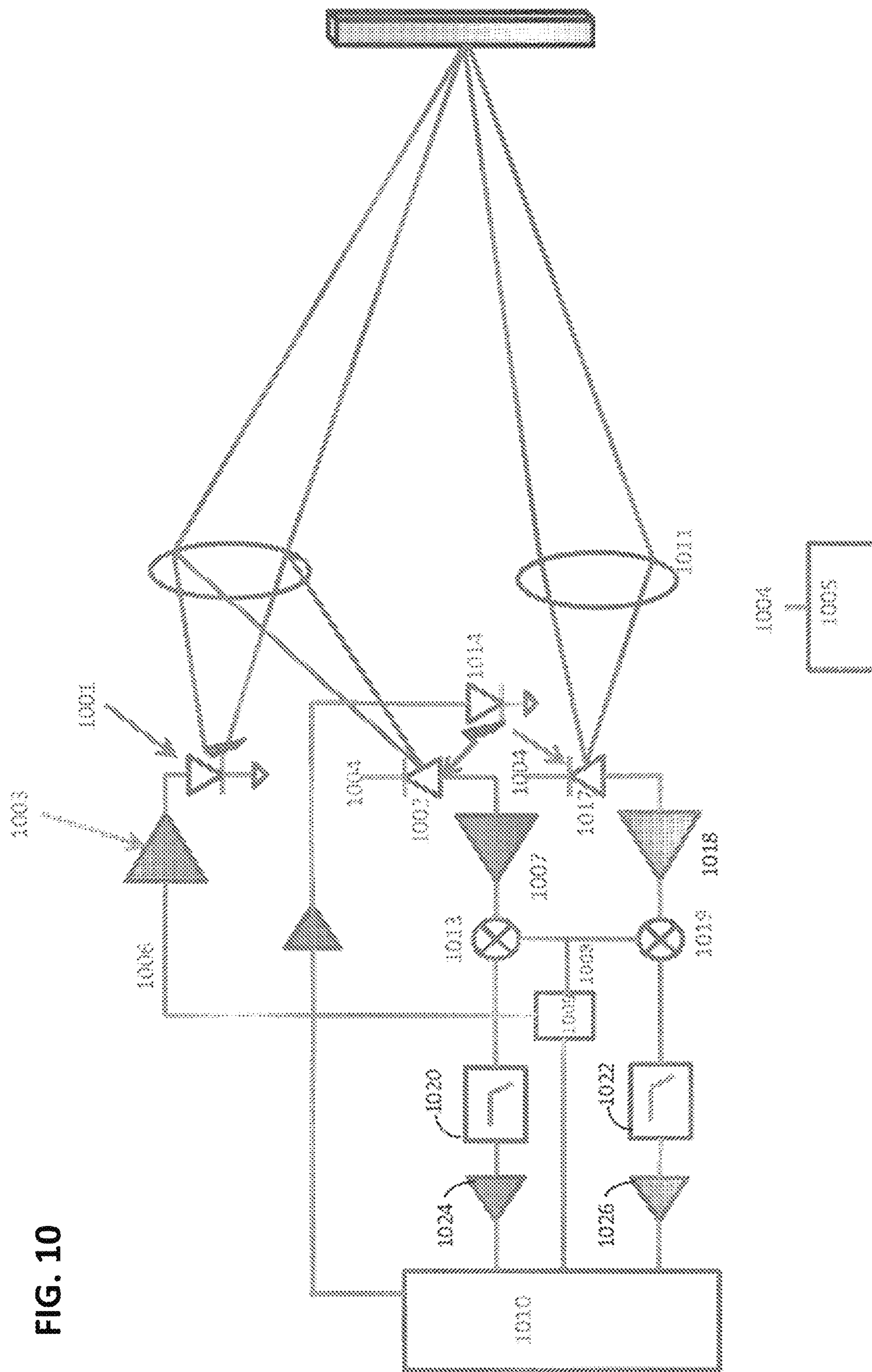


FIG. 10

FIG. 11

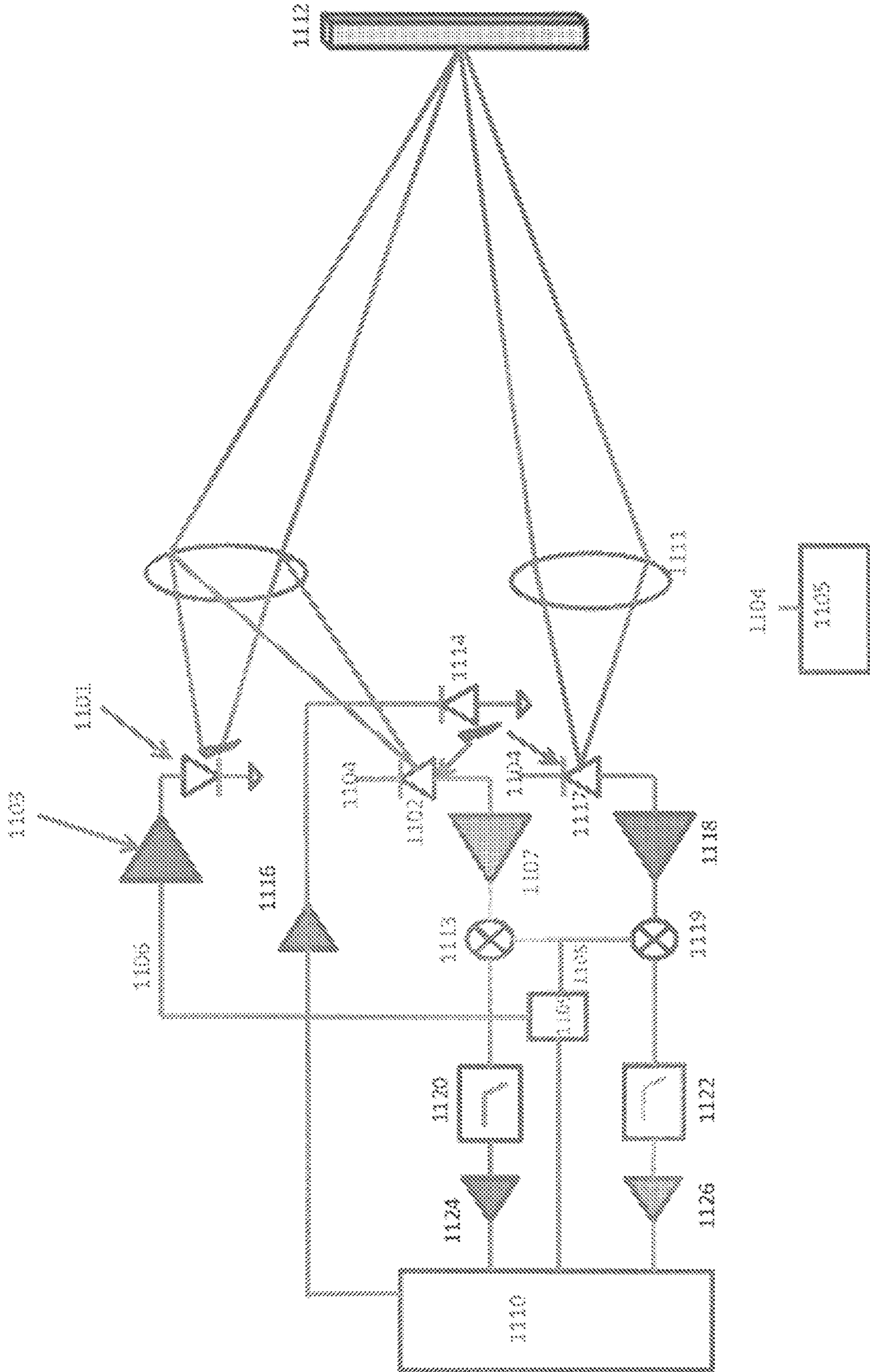
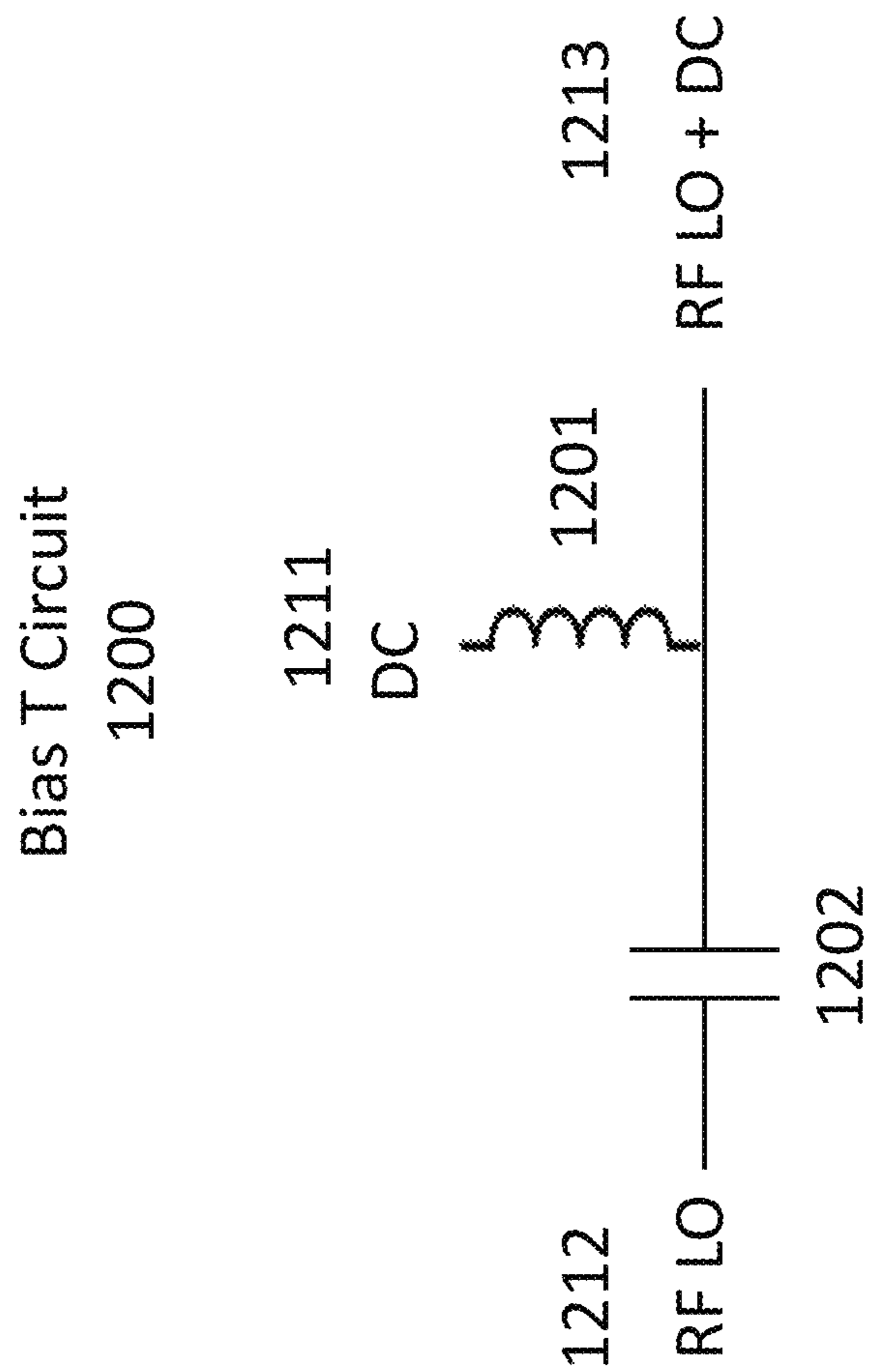
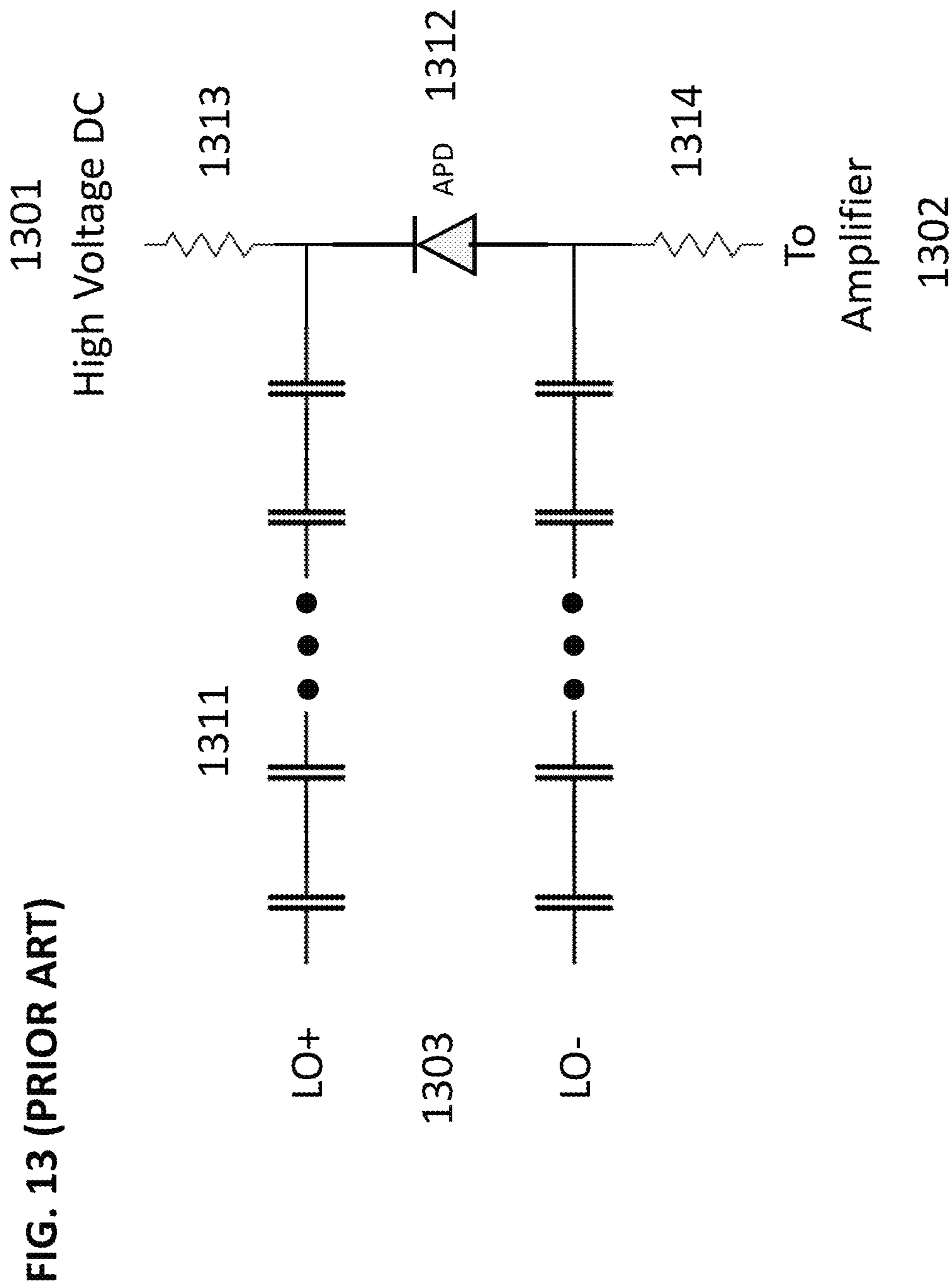


FIG. 12 (PRIOR ART)





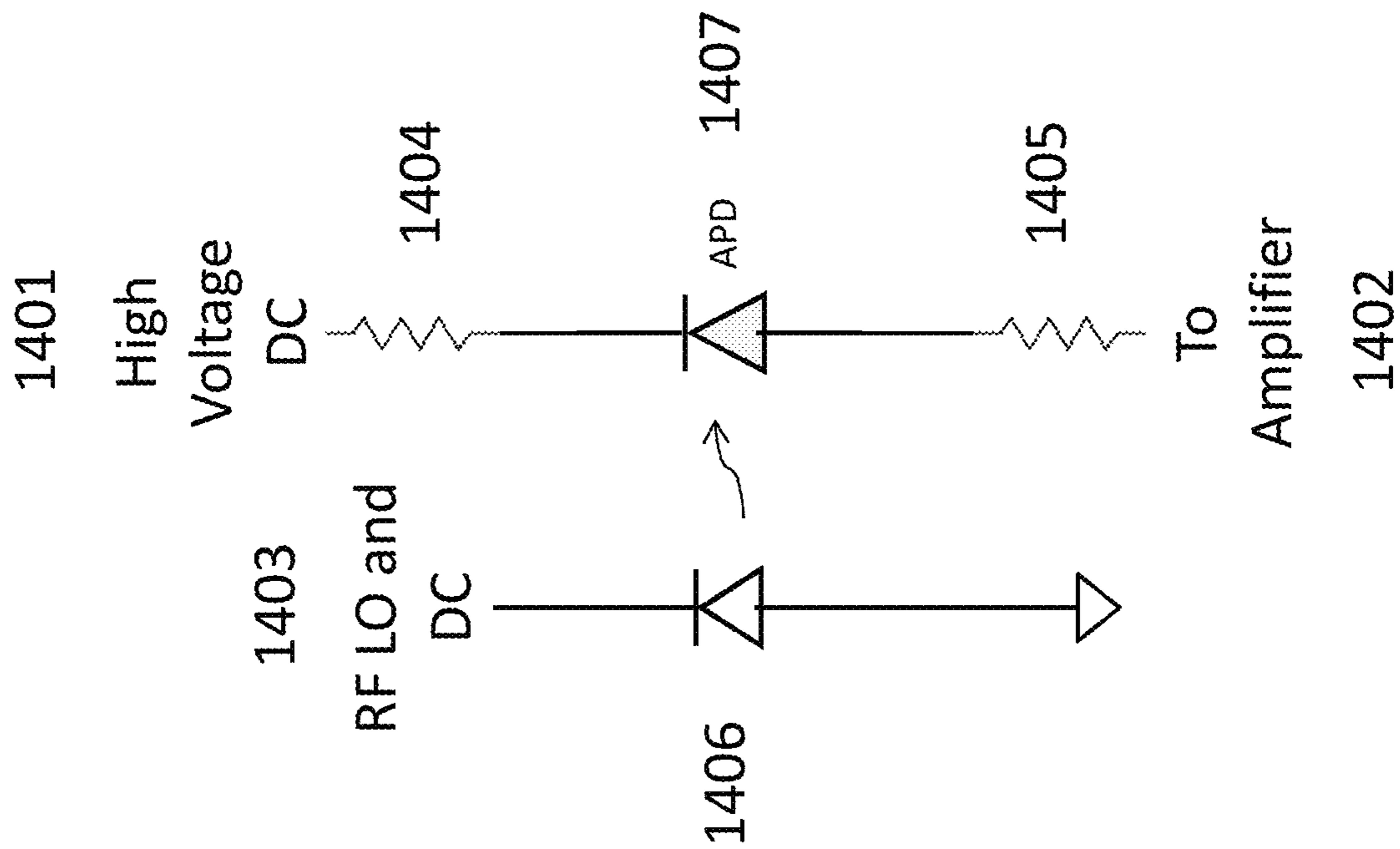


FIG. 14

FIG. 15

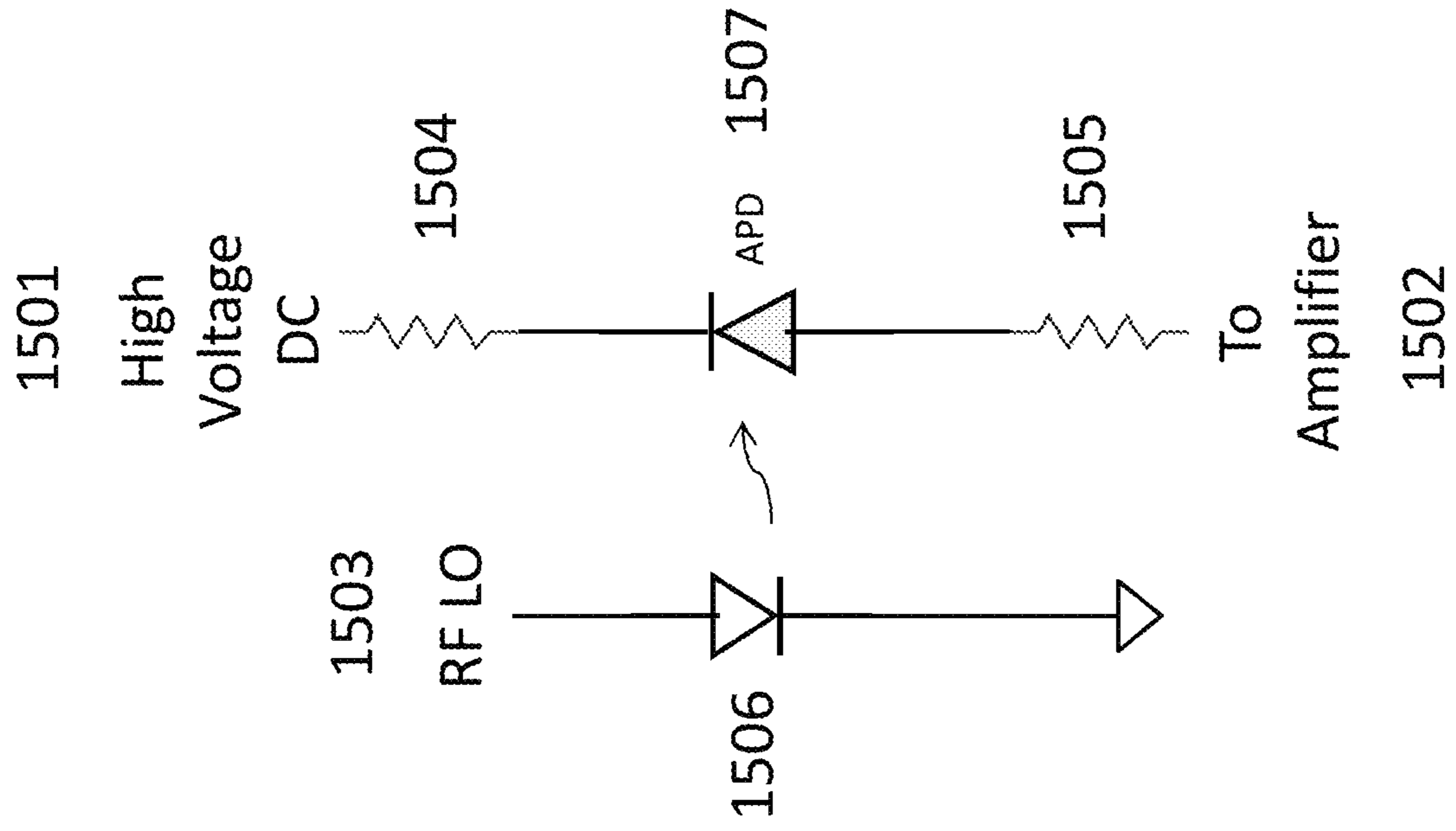


FIG. 16

LED
1600

N-
Diffusion
1603

P-
Diffusion
1604

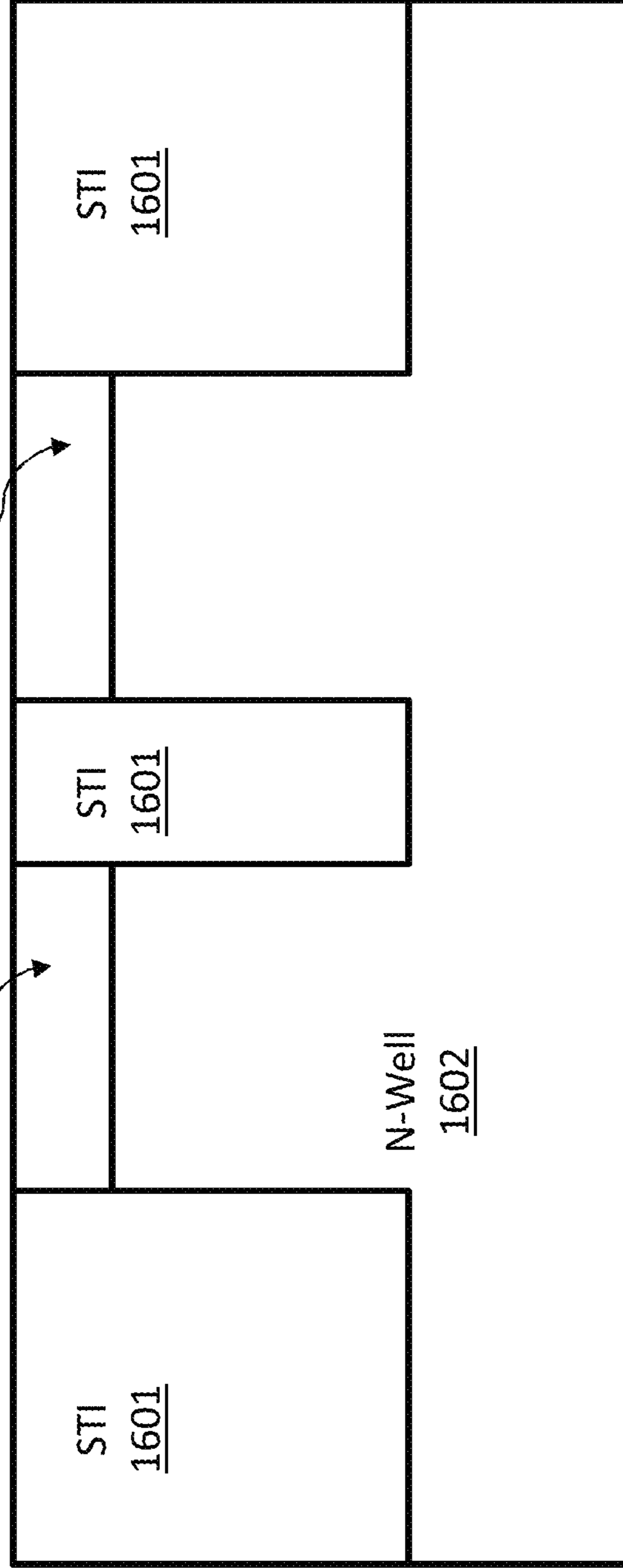
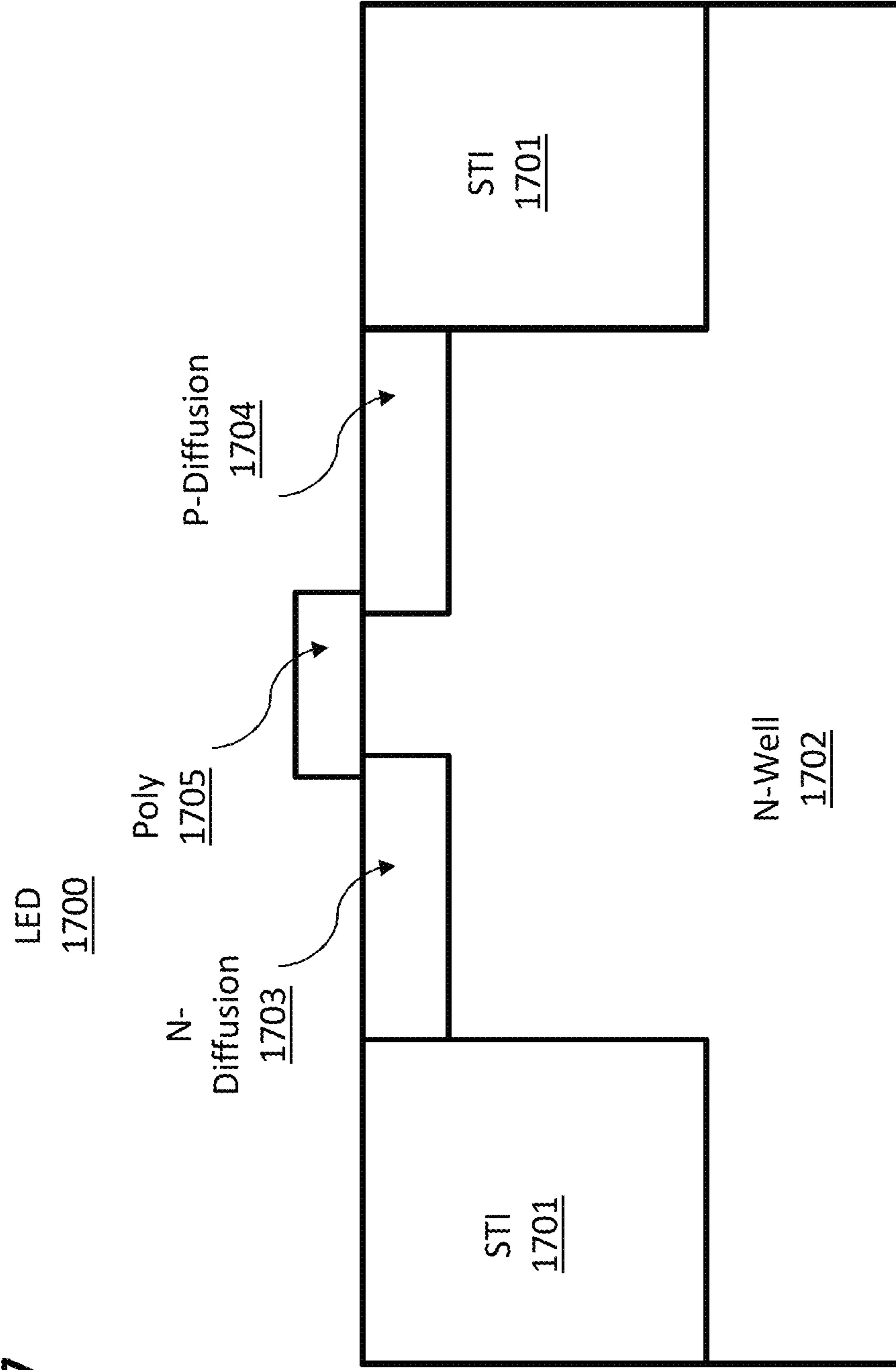


FIG. 17



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**INJECTING AN RF LOCAL OSCILLATOR
SIGNAL INTO AN AVALANCHE PHOTO
DIODE USING PHOTONS EMITTED FROM
A LIGHT EMITTING DIODE**

RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/458,969, filed on Mar. 14, 2017, and titled, "Using Integrated Silicon LED to Calibrate Phase Offset in Optical Receiver in Laser Range Finder", which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 62/307,577, filed on Mar. 14, 2016, and titled, "Using Integrated Silicon LED as a Mean to Calibrate Phase Offset in Optical Receiver in Laser Range Finder", each of which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD

The present disclosure generally relates to laser range finders. In one embodiment, a shallow-trench isolation diode operating in a reverse-biased mode is used for calibration. In another embodiment, a poly-defined diode operating in a forward-biased mode is used for calibration.

BACKGROUND

Present laser range finders use either the time of flight method for finding the distance to an object or an RF modulated light signal wherein the phase of the transmitted and reflected light signals are compared to extract distance using the speed of light. The latter method is more widespread since it is easier to implement. A factor that determines the distance measurement accuracy is the calibration means. There are many random variables that degrade accuracy such as temperature, component drift, and internal gain settings. To achieve 1 mm or better accuracy, frequent calibration is required. This requires that the laser range finder be self-calibrating. A requirement for inclusion in a mobile device (e.g., cell phones) is to have the range finder be highly integrated and use very little power.

An optoelectronic distance measurement system for use in a mobile device (e.g., mobile phone) includes a lens system, a laser diode emitting a high frequency intensity modulated measurement optical light signal, and at least one receiver photodetector for receiving the measurement light signal reflected from a measurement object surface. A small portion of the optical signal from the laser is coupled to a reference photodetector and mixed with a reference local oscillator frequency which has a small offset frequency from that of the laser modulation frequency to generate an intermediate frequency reference signal for phase measurement. The receiver photodetector converts the high frequency optical signal reflected from the measurement object surface to a high frequency electrical signal. The receiver high frequency photodetector signal is mixed in a high frequency demodulator with the reference local oscillator to generate an intermediate frequency signal while preserving the phase delay information. A microcontroller combined with an Analog-to-Digital Converter (ADC) measures the phase difference of the intermediate frequency between the laser transmitting reference or calibration signal and the received reflected signal. The phase difference between these signals is directly proportional to the distance to be measured factoring in the speed of light.

For a laser range finder in mobile phone applications, it is desirable that the laser emitting power is limited to the Food

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and Drug Administration Class 1. It is generally required to have laser optical power below 1 milliwatt in the visible spectrum range for continuous wave operation. In order to be able to fit into the form factor of a mobile phone, there should not be any mechanical moving part or parts in the laser range finder. The lens assembly is also limited by the dimensional limitations of a typical mobile phone. It is preferred that the diameter of the lens not exceed 4 millimeter, while the height of entire range finder assembly not exceed 3 millimeter.

Since the optical signal strength at the photodetector drops off at one over the square of the range distance ($1/R^2$), the photodetector and subsequent amplifier should have significant dynamic range to ensure that the range finder has 1 millimeter resolution for a range from 10 millimeter to 10 meters. In addition, the surface optical reflectance of a measurement object is an unknown. A dedicated automatic gain control mechanism is needed to adjust the gain of the photodetector to ensure that there is a sufficient signal to noise ratio to recover the phase information.

In addition to recovering the optical signal, it is desirable for the range finder to have the phase information be consistent at different gain settings. It is also desirable to calibrate the photodetector and subsequent intermediate frequency filter's phase to ensure that the laser range finder operation be substantially independent of measurement object surface reflectance, optical component variations, and electronic component variation and aging effects.

One challenge in building the embodiments of the range finder described herein include being able to quickly bias the light emitting diode used in the range finder. Prior art techniques use either off-chip circuitry or on-chip circuitry for this purpose. However, on-chip techniques involve the use of a capacitor stack that consumes a significant amount of space within the chip.

What is needed is a new mechanism for quickly biasing a light emitting diode to its proper reverse breakdown voltage and at the same time efficiently introduce a high frequency RF local oscillator signal on to the DC bias voltage in an integrated circuit, while using less physical space on the chip compared to the prior art.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Embodiments of laser range finders are disclosed. In certain embodiments, a light emitting diode within an integrated circuit in the laser range finder is biased to its proper reverse breakdown voltage, and at the same time, a high frequency RF local oscillator signal is efficiently introduced on to the bias voltage.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 shows an example of a laser range finder in a mobile device.

FIG. 2 shows an example of a laser range finder system.

FIG. 3 shows an example of an avalanche photo diode with bias and frequency mixer circuitry.

FIG. 4 is a plot illustrating an example of capacitance of an avalanche photo diode versus reverse bias.

FIG. 5 shows an example of an equivalent avalanche photo diode circuit model.

FIG. 6 are plots illustrating an example of a frequency response of an avalanche photo diode low pass filter.

FIG. 7 shows an example of a bandpass Bode plot for an IF filter.

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FIG. 8 is a plot illustrating measurements for a silicon LED according to certain aspects of the present disclosure.

FIG. 9 shows an example of a range finder with RF and IF calibration according to certain aspects of the present disclosure.

FIG. 10 shows another example of a range finder with RF and IF calibration according to certain aspects of the present disclosure.

FIG. 11 shows an example of a range finder with combined RF and IF calibration according to certain aspects of the present disclosure.

FIG. 12 depicts a prior art bias T circuit.

FIG. 13 depicts a prior art bias circuit within an integrated circuit.

FIG. 14 depicts an embodiment of a bias and RF local oscillator injection system for an avalanche photo diode.

FIG. 15 depicts another embodiment of a bias and RF local oscillator injection system for an avalanche photo diode.

FIG. 16 depicts a cross-section of a light emitting diode based on shallow trench isolation.

FIG. 17 depicts another cross-section of a light emitting polygate defined junction diode.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The detailed description set forth below, in connection with the appended drawings, is intended as a description of various configurations and is not intended to represent the only configurations in which the concepts described herein may be practiced. The detailed description includes specific details for the purpose of providing a thorough understanding of the various concepts. However, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that these concepts may be practiced without these specific details. In some instances, well-known structures and components are shown in block diagram form in order to avoid obscuring such concepts.

An Improved Laser Range Finder

FIG. 1 shows an example in which a miniaturized laser range finder 102 in a cellular phone 101 or other mobile device uses a laser beam 103 to measure the distance between the cellular phone 101 and a target object 104.

FIG. 2 shows an example of a laser range finder system including a laser 201 (e.g., diode laser). The laser 201 is driven at a laser modulation frequency by a driver 203. The laser modulation frequency 204 is generated by a PLL 213 (or another frequency synthesizer) and is between 100 MHz to a few GHz, depending on the capability of the laser and the electronics. The modulation frequency 204 is generated by an offset frequency from a local oscillator frequency (labeled LO in FIG. 2) using the PLL 213. The offset frequency is generally between 1 kHz~50 kHz.

The laser range finder system also includes a reference photodetector 205, and a target photodetector 206. In some embodiments, each of the photodetectors may be implemented with an Avalanche Photo Diode (APD) biased by a APD bias voltage (labeled "APD Bias" in FIG. 2) generated by a voltage supply 210.

In operation, a lens 202 focuses the optical light signal (beam) output by the laser 201 on a target object 220. A small portion of the light signal is scattered by the lens 202 and detected by reference photodetector 205. The reference photodetector 205 converts the detected light signal into an electrical signal at the laser modulation frequency, which is amplified by a TIA 208 and mixed with the local oscillator frequency in a high frequency mixer 211 to generate an intermediate frequency (IF) signal. The IF signal is filtered

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by an IF filter 214, amplified by an amplifier 216, and converted into a digital signal by an ADC (not shown) for processing in the digital domain by a controller 218, as discussed further below

The lens 207 focuses the light signal reflected off the target 220 to the target photodetector 206 for detection by the target photodetector 206. The target photodetector 206 converts the detected light signal into an electrical signal at the laser modulation frequency, which is amplified by a TIA 209 and mixed with the local oscillator frequency in a high frequency mixer 212 to generate an intermediate frequency (IF) signal. The IF signal is filtered by an IF filter 215, amplified by an amplifier 217, and converted into a digital signal by an ADC (not shown) for processing in the digital domain by the controller 218.

The controller 218 computes the phase offset between the reference signal and the target signal, which provides time of flight information for the light signal reflected off of the target. The controller 218 then uses the phase offset and speed of light to estimate the distance to the target. The controller 218 may output the estimated distance to another processor (e.g., for display to a user).

In order for the laser range finder system to function independent of the outside influence in the receiver path, it may be necessary to calibrate both the RF and IF circuits. In this regard, embodiments of the present disclosure use an "on chip" integrated silicon LED to calibrate the phase offset setting of the photodetector at different gain settings and the IF filters to ensure resolution of 1 millimeter or better. In certain embodiments, an "on chip" silicon LED is used to generate a reference light signal for calibration, as described further below. The silicon LED may produce light in the forward mode (IR) or in reverse, avalanche mode (visible light). The use of an "on chip" silicon LED for calibration provides for component cost reduction and size reduction.

As an example, 300 MHz results in an "electronic wavelength length" of 1 meter in free space. In order to resolve better than 1 millimeter, the laser range finder needs to be able to resolve phase angle between the received modulated intensity optical signal and the reference optical signal better than 0.36 degree ($1/1000$ of a full circle 360 degree). Measurement errors introduced by the system include temperature, variations in photodetector gain, mismatching and manufacturing variation of components, and aging effects on the system. Lookup tables and mathematic algorithms are not capable of ensuring measurement accuracy under all conditions.

The function of a photodetector in the receiver at RF is to convert the reflected RF modulated optical signal from the measurement object surface to an RF electrical signal. A variable gain function is also needed in order to increase the dynamic range requirement of the receiver. It is also another function for the receiver to be used as a high-frequency mixer. An exemplary implementation is shown in FIG. 3.

The exemplary circuit shown in FIG. 3 acts as an optical/electrical converter, variable gain amplifier, and RF high frequency mixer. In this example, the photodetector is implemented with an APD 301 that is biased by APD bias voltage. When the APD 301 is biased below its junction breakdown voltage, it is in linear mode, in which the electrical output signal is linearly proportional to the input optical signal. It is desirable that variable gain is achieved by biasing the APD until a useable signal to noise level is achieved. Typically, the avalanche gain of the APD increases with APD bias. Therefore, adjusting the APD bias is a simple and effective means to achieve gain control. When the bias voltage is sufficiently low, the linear APD can behave like an

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attenuator. Such a dynamic attenuator is needed when the measured object surface is at very close range to the photodetector. For this case, the signal needs to be attenuated to avoid overwhelming the subsequent signal path. This method of gain control is simple yet effective in extending the dynamic range of receiver. Local oscillator (LO) signals can be also be injected through the use of differential bias-T for performing mixing.

The exemplary circuit shown in FIG. 3 may be used to implement the photodetector 205, TIA 208 and mixer 211 shown in FIG. 2. The circuit may also be used to implement the photodetector 205, TIA 209 and mixer 212 in FIG. 2. In this example, the voltage supply 210 may provide the APD bias, which can be adjusted to achieve variable gain, as discussed above.

As a consequence of varying the bias on a APD to achieve variable gain, the depletion capacitance of the APD changes. In this regard, FIG. 4 shows an example of the capacitance of the APD as a function of a reverse bias.

FIG. 5 shows a simple equivalent APD circuit model. The circuit model consists of a basic RC low-pass filter with an APD depletion capacitance ($C_{depletion}$) which depends on APD bias and a drift resistor (R_{drift}) which has a temperature dependency. The phase response of the APD circuit is that of a RC low-pass filter as shown in FIG. 6.

A very small change in the APD bias and the corresponding depletion capacitance and temperature results in significant change in phase angle response.

As discussed above, IF is generated by mixing the laser modulation frequency with a local oscillator frequency. The IF filter (e.g., IF 214 or 215) should be a narrow bandpass filter to improve the noise in the IF receiver path. In practice, the bandpass of the IF filter should be around 1 kHz to 50 kHz. Noise of the IF filter is proportional to its bandwidth. However, it should not be too narrow to have high attenuation at passband. In this frequency range, the IF filter can be implemented using electronics with minimal interference from the environment. For example, the IF filter can be implemented using an active or passive analog filter. The IF filter can also be implemented digitally.

The bandpass IF filter also introduces its own phase error to the system. In this regard, FIG. 7 shows an example of the phase response of a bandpass filter. As can be seen in the example in FIG. 7, the phase response of the filter is particularly sensitive with respect to the frequency at the center of the passband. Environmental effects, component variations, and aging will significantly alter the phase of the resulting signal.

In addition, the center frequency of bandpass filter might have an offset with respect to the IF frequency due to mismatch of components. This mismatch can skew the phase offset in the IF phase measurement.

In addressing the above challenges, embodiments of the present disclosure provide systems and methods to correct the phase offset in the RF and/or IF signal path of a laser range finder caused by component mismatch due to, for example, environment (e.g., changes in temperature), process variation during manufacturing, and aging.

Embodiments of the present disclosure use an "on chip" silicon LED to generate a light signal for calibration. An advantage of an "on chip" silicon LED is that the silicon LED may be integrated with other components of the range finder on the same chip (die) including the photo detectors, mixers, filters and/or amplifiers. Silicon is an indirect band-gap material. Its light generation efficiency is low compared to direct bandgap material, such as gallium arsenide. It is generally accepted that silicon LED quantum efficiency is

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less than 10^{-5} . In this regard, FIG. 8 shows exemplary measurements for a silicon LED, in which the silicon LED is driven with an LED drive current and a photo detector is used to detect light emitted by the silicon LED. More particularly, FIG. 8 shows the drive current 810 and a ratio 820 of the detection current of the photo detector over the drive current (which is a measure of coupling efficiency between the silicon LED and photo detector).

In this example, the silicon LED comprises a P/N junction in Silicon On Insulator (SOI) process with a P/Nwell photodetector across a dielectrically isolated barrier. The silicon LED is fully dielectrically isolated from the photo detector. In this setup, the coupling efficiency between the silicon LED and photo detector is around 10^{-7} . It is also shown that the coupling efficiency is essentially constant over 5 decades of LED driving current. LED current can be forward bias or reverse bias. Photo detector current is proportional to the absolute current through silicon LED junction.

In the case of a laser range finder, the optical signal strength decreases proportional to $1/R^2$, and proportional to the receiver lens area intercepting the incoming photons. The received signal strength at the optical detector (photo detector) can be less than 10^{-9} of the laser optical power. To the optical detector/receiver of laser range finder, the silicon LED light emission/coupling can be efficiently used as a means to optically/electrically calibrate the receiver path to establish "zero path" offset resulting from environment, mismatch and aging of components used in the receiver path.

In this regard, FIG. 9 shows an example of a range finder system including a silicon LED 902 for calibration according to certain aspects of the present disclosure. The range finder system includes a laser 906 with its light output modulated at the laser modulation frequency. The range finder system also includes a target photo detector 901 and a reference photo detector 907, each of which may be implemented with an APD. The reference photo detector 907 establishes the reference path from the laser light. The range finder system also includes a lens 905, which is represented as an optical beam splitter in FIG. 9. The lens 905 may pass most of the light signal from the laser 906 to the target 904 while scattering a small portion of the light signal to the reference photo detector 907. The surface scattering will be more than enough to be picked up by reference photo detector 907 as zero path reference. The electrical signal output of the reference photo detector is mixed in mixer 908 with local oscillator signal 909 to generate IF signal 910 of the reference path. The light signal from the laser strikes target 904 and scattered light is picked up by lens 903 to focus the reflected signal onto the target photo detector 901. The electrical signal output of the target photo detector 901 is mixed in mixer 911 with local oscillator signal 909 to generate the IF signal of the receive path 912. The IF signals in the reference path and receiver path may be filtered by respective IF filters and converted into digital signals by respective ADCs for processing by a controller. The controller may compute a phase offset measurement between the reference and receiver paths based on the received IF signals, as discussed above.

Once the laser measurement is done, the controller may shut down the laser 906. The silicon LED 902 may then be driven by a driver to generate a modulated light signal to be picked up (detected) simultaneously by photo detectors 901 and 907. The silicon LED 920 can be modulated at RF or IF frequency. The electrical signal output of the reference photo detector is mixed in mixer 908 with local oscillator signal 909 to generate IF signal 910 of the reference path. The

electrical signal output of the target photo detector **901** is mixed in mixer **911** with local oscillator signal **909** to generate the IF signal of the receive path. The IF signals in the reference path and receiver path may be filtered by the respective IF filters and converted into digital signals by the respective ADCs for processing by the controller. The controller may compute a calibration phase offset between the reference and receiver paths based on the received IF signals. The calibration phase offset may be caused by component mismatch due to, for example, environment (e.g., changes in temperature), process variation during manufacturing, and aging. Thus, the controller can subtract out the calibration phase offset from the phase offset measurement to correct the phase offset measurement for the component mismatch, resulting in a corrected phase offset, which improves the accuracy of the range finder. The controller may use the resulting corrected phase offset to estimate the distance from the chip to the target.

The silicon LED **902** is able to calibrate both the photo detector phase response and electronic filter element phase response simultaneously. Light, such as background lighting on target, not modulated at exact RF and IF frequency will not be picked up by the photo detectors due to the selectivity of the receiver.

FIG. **10** shows an example of a range finder system using an silicon LED in forward bias mode to calibrate at IF. Initially, the laser **1001** is driven by laser driver **1003** at the laser modulation frequency **1006**, which may be offset from the local oscillator frequency **1008** by the IF. The modulation frequency **1006** and local oscillation frequency **1008** are generated by PLL **1009**. IF frequency is controlled by controller **1010** and it is the difference in frequency between modulation frequency and local oscillator frequency. The light signal (laser beam) output by the laser **1001** is focused by lens **1011** onto the target **1012**. A small portion of light is reflected off the lens surface to be picked up by reference photo detector **1002** to generate reference path signal. The photo detector **1002** may be implemented with an APD that is reverse biased by high voltage supply **1005** to adjust the multiplication factor in APD. Controller **1010** may control the high voltage supply **1005** to modulate the gain of APD as the distance and reflectivity of target changes.

The light signal strikes target **1012** and scatters. A portion of the light signal scattered (reflected) off of the target is picked up by lens **1011** to focus onto the target photo detector **1017**. Each photo detector converts the respective light signal to a respective electrical signal. The electrical signals from the photo detectors **1002** and **1017** pass through a symmetrical set of TIAs **1007** and **1018**, mixers **1013** and **1019**, IF filters **1020** and **1022**, and amplifiers **1024** and **1026** to controller **1010** to be digitized. Controller **1010** computes the phase offset between the reference and received signals to obtain a phase offset measurement.

Once the range measurement is complete, the range finder enters a calibration mode. In the calibration mode, the laser **1001** is shut down. Controller **1010** drives the silicon LED **1014** in forward bias using LED driver **1016** at IF frequency. In forward bias mode, the electrical to optical conversion is slow due to diffusion capacitance of the forward bias diode junction. In forward bias, the silicon junction voltage is also low for low power consumption. Silicon LED is fabricated in close proximity to both photo detector **1002** and **1017** to be optically coupled to both photo detectors **1002** and **1017**. Each of the photo detectors **1002** and **1017** converts the light received from the silicon LED **1014** into a respective electrical signal. The electrical signals output from the photo detectors **1002** and **1017** pass through a symmetrical set of

TIAs **1007** and **1018**, mixers **1013** and **1019**, IF filters **1020** and **1022**, and amplifiers **1024** and **1026** to controller **1010** to be digitized. Controller **1010** computes the phase offset between the reference and received signals to obtain a calibration phase offset, and may subtract out the calibration phase offset from the phase offset measurement to correct for mismatches in the components at IF. Thus, small mismatches in components at IF can be zeroed out in the controller in phase offset. Controller **1010** may estimate the distance from the chip to the target using the corrected phase offset.

The sequence of measurement and calibration can be exchangeable, depending on need. Also, the frequency of calibration can be modified depending on range measurement accuracy requirement, environmental conditions, measurement time, and signal to noise ratio (SNR) of received signal at receiver.

FIG. **11** shows an example of a range finder system using a silicon LED to calibrate both RF and IF. The system setup is similar to that of IF calibration with exception that the silicon LED **1114** is reverse biased. In the example in FIG. **11**, the silicon LED is driven in reverse bias avalanche mode. In avalanche mode, the silicon LED can generate optical signals directly at RF frequency. The quantum efficiency is in 10^{-5} to 10^{-6} . Light emission is proportional to injected electrical current. The bandwidth of integrated silicon LED in avalanche mode is limited by the drift resistance and depletion capacitance of silicon junction. The reverse breakdown voltage of integrated silicon LED with modern CMOS process can range from 6V to 12V depending on CMOS process generation. Reverse breakdown voltage can be generated by a charge pump circuit in LED driver **1116**. In this example, the LED driver **1116** may drive the silicon LED **1114** at the LO frequency or the laser modulation frequency.

In distance measurement mode, the laser **1101** is driven by driver **1103** to generate modulated light output at modulation frequency **1106**. PLL **1109** under the control of controller **1110** generates modulation frequency **1106** and local oscillator frequency **1108**. As discussed above, the modulation frequency may be offset from the local oscillator frequency by IF.

The light signal output from the laser **1101** is focused onto the target **1112** by lens **1111**. The lens surface reflects a small portion of light signal back to the reference photo detector **1102**. A portion of the light signal is scattered (reflected) off the target **1112** back towards the receiver. The lens **1111** focuses the light signal scattered off the target to target photo detector **1117**. The photo detectors **1102** and **1117** may be implemented with APDs **1102** and **1117** that are reverse biased by high voltage supply **1105** at high bias voltage **1104**. High bias voltage **1104** may be adjusted to modulate the multiplication factor of the APDs. In this example, the controller **1110** may control the bias voltage **1104** of the high voltage supply **1105** to optimize APD gain to have a good SNR per target distance and reflectivity. Each photo detector converts the respective light signal to a respective electrical signal. The electrical signals from the photo detectors **1102** and **1117** pass through a symmetrical set of TIAs **1107** and **1118**, mixers **1013** and **1019**, IF filters **1120** and **1122**, and amplifiers **1124** and **1126** to controller **1110** to be digitized. Controller **1110** computes the phase offset between the reference and received signals to obtain a phase offset measurement.

In calibration mode, the laser **1101** is switched off. The controller **1110** drives the silicon LED **1114** in reverse breakdown using high voltage driver **1016** at RF frequency. The RF frequency can be either local oscillator frequency

1108 or modulator frequency **1106**. The light output of the silicon LED **1114** is picked up (detected) by the photo detectors **1102** and **1117** in close proximity. Each of the photo detectors **1102** and **1117** converts the light received from the silicon LED **1114** into a respective electrical signal. The electrical signals from the photo detectors **1102** and **1117** pass through a symmetrical set of TIAs **1107** and **1118**, mixers **1013** and **1019**, IF filters **1120** and **1122**, and amplifiers **1124** and **1126** to controller **1110** to be digitized. The controller **1110** computes the phase offset between the reference and received signals to obtain a calibration phase offset, and subtracts out the calibration phase offset from the phase offset measurement to correct for mismatches in the components at RF and IF. Thus, small mismatches in components at RF and IF can be zeroed out in the controller in phase offset. The controller may then compute the distance between the chip and the target using the corrected phase offset. Thus, the calibration phase offset (also referred to as zero path phase offset) is applied to correct the measured phase offset to derive the accurate measurement of distance between the chip and target.

In reverse biasing the silicon LED at RF, power consumption by silicon LED will be higher than that of forward biased silicon LED used for IF calibration. However, using reverse bias at RF, components at both RF and IF can be calibrated at once.

As in IF calibration, the sequence of measurement and calibration can be exchangeable, depending on need. Also, the frequency of calibration can be modified depending on range measurement accuracy requirement, environmental conditions, measurement time, and signal to noise ratio (SNR) of received signal at receiver.

The controller according to any of the embodiments discussed above may be implemented using hardwired logic, programmable logic, and/or a processor configured to execute code that causes the processor to perform the operations discussed herein. The code may reside in RAM memory, flash memory, ROM memory, EPROM memory, EEPROM memory, registers, or any other form of storage medium known in the art. An exemplary storage medium may be coupled to the processor such that the processor can read code from storage medium and execute the code to perform the operations discussed herein.

Injecting an RF Local Oscillator Signal into an Avalanche Photo Diode

As described above, the disclosed embodiments of the laser range finder utilize LEDs in the calibration process, such as LED **902** in FIG. 9, LED **1014** in FIG. 10, and LED **1114** in FIG. 11, as well as one or more APDs. An APD requires a high voltage reverse bias to achieve the proper gain in sensitivity. Moreover, in order to have the APD act as a mixer, it is also necessary to introduce a Radio Frequency (RF) Local Oscillator (LO) signal superimposed on top of the high voltage DC bias. For the DC bias component, an on-chip charge-pump circuit can be used. Embodiments of the invention provide an efficient means to introduce an RF LO signal into a high voltage biased APD.

FIG. 12 depicts a prior art off-chip circuit for adding an RF signal to a DC voltage in a non-Integrated Circuit (IC) context. Bias-T circuit **1200** is used to introduce an RF signal in the presence of a DC voltage. High voltage DC **1211** is introduced through an inductor **1201**. Inductor **1201** acts as a short circuit to DC bias, while acting as an open circuit to high frequency RF circuit. High frequency RF signal **1212** is introduced through capacitor **1202**. Capacitor **1202** acts as a short circuit to high frequency RF signal **1212**, while blocking DC current. Thus, DC high voltage is iso-

lated by capacitor **1202**. At the output of **1213**, a high frequency RF signal is superimposed on a DC voltage.

FIG. 13 depicts a prior art circuit for adding an RF signal to a DC voltage in an IC context (on-chip). An on-chip component voltage rating must be observed to ensure long operating life. High voltage **1301** is introduced from a charge-pump circuit (not shown). The output of APD **1312** is connected to amplifier **1302**. APD **1312** is isolated from the high voltage supply and amplifier using resistors **1313** and **1314**. APD photo current is in the order of 10 pA to 1 uA. A very reasonable resistance value of 10 k to 10 Meg can be used as isolation resistors in place of inductor **1201** in bias-T circuit **1200** of FIG. 12. DC blocking capacitor must be able to tolerate the high voltage without the need for dedicated processing steps while keeping its size manageable.

A capacitor stack **1311** is used to ensure individual capacitor voltages stay within limit. Additional components, such as junction diodes and resistors, may be needed to further ensure high voltage is divided evenly between different capacitors and to account for process variation and aging. The net capacitance of the capacitor stack **1311** must be at least 10 times greater than that of junction capacitance of APD **1312**. The high voltage tolerant capacitor array **1311** occupies significant die area comparing that of APD **1312**. It is not unreasonable that in a typical IC process, capacitor stack **1311** array demands a die area that is 100 to 1000 times greater than that of APD **1312**. This large area also introduces large parasitic capacitance to die substrate that significantly limits high frequency performance of DC blocking capacitor. It can be appreciated that the space consumed by capacitor stack **1311** can be substantial.

FIG. 14 shows an embodiment of the invention that overcomes the challenges of the prior art circuits of FIGS. 12 and 13. LED **1406** (which can be LED **902** in FIG. 9, LED **1014** in FIG. 10, and LED **1114** in FIG. 11) is reverse biased. RF signal **1403** is superimposed on to the reverse biased junction diode **1406**. In this situation, hot-carrier will occur. Hot-carrier sweeping across the junction barrier under the influence of bias voltage will result in a weak photo-emission from small junction diode **1406**. Silicon is not a direct bandgap material in photo-emission. Silicon photo-emission efficiency is very low, from 1e-7 to 1e-4 comparing to direct bandgap material. As part of a laser range finder, APD **1407** (which can be APD **301** in FIG. 3, APD **1002** or **1017** in FIG. 10, APD **1102** or APD **1117** in FIG. 11) offers exceptional sensitivity to photo-emission. Depending on high voltage bias, it offers gain from 1 to 100. Here, it is to be understood that APD **1407** can be APD **301**, APD **1102**, or APD **1117** described above in previous embodiments.

It has been known that hot-carrier emission generated in a reverse bias junction has exceptional frequency response. A high frequency optical signal can be efficiently generated depending on junction bias. FIG. 14 is an embodiment suitable for use in an IC. It is found that photo-emission is directly proportional to the reverse bias current. Reverse bias current is only dependent on the breakdown junction perimeter edge width, not its junction area. It is found that current density between 5 uA to 500 uA per micron of junction perimeter edge width has the best performance in emission efficiency and high frequency response. It is also found that in a typical IC process, coupling efficiency between reverse biased junction emitter to APD can be between 1e-4 to 1e-7. Coupling efficiency is defined as APD photo signal current over the reverse junction photo emitter current. In a laser range finder, APD **1407** is biased in breakdown. Photo-emission from reverse biased junction will make APD

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behave like a switch. RF photo-emission will mix with reflected laser light signal received from a distant object and will result in the desired Intermediate Frequency (IF) for further signal processing.

The most obvious advantage in using a simple reverse bias junction diode, such as LED 1406, as a photo emitter as a means to inject an RF LO signal into APD 1407 is the die size savings compared to the circuit of FIG. 13. The photon-emitting junction diode only needs to be 5~50 um in junction perimeter width to achieve the proper coupling of the RF signal into the APD.

A proper junction spacing between APD and photon-emitting junction diode is also needed to prevent junction from latchup. In typical silicon process, spacing between 5 um to 20 um will be sufficient. As in a typical embodiment, the size of photon-emitting reverse junction diode is only one one-hundredth of the size of APD. It is also independent of the junction capacitance of APD. This enables significant die size saving compared to that of a DC-blocking capacitor.

In the embodiment of FIG. 15, an RF LO signal is coupled to APD 1507 (which can be APD 301 in FIG. 3, APD 1002 or 1017 in FIG. 10, APD 1102 or APD 1117 in FIG. 11) using LED 1506 (which can be LED 902 in FIG. 9, LED 1014 in FIG. 10, and LED 1114 in FIG. 11) biased in a forward direction. The main difference compared to the embodiment of FIG. 14 is that LED 1506 is biased in the forward direction instead of the reverse direction.

FIG. 16 depicts LED 1600, which is an LED embodiment that can be used as LED 1406 in FIG. 14 or 1506 in FIG. 15, or as LED 902 in FIG. 9, LED 1014 in FIG. 10, and LED 1114 in FIG. 11. LED 1600 is a shallow-trench isolation (STI) diode comprising STI areas 1601, N-well 1602, N-diffusion area 1603 (which is the N junction of the diode), and P-diffusion area 1604 (which is the P junction of the diode). Thus, the junction and N junction are separated by an STI area 1601. Although N-diffusion area 1603 is shown separately from N-well 1602, they actually are physically the same composition, with N-diffusion area 1603 serving as a terminal for an electrical connection outside of LED 1600.

In a forward-bias mode, LED 1600 is relatively slow in turning off. The period of time for the turning off to complete is known as reverse recovery time. The reverse recovery time is needed because the STI area 1601 between the P-diffusion area 1604 and the N-diffusion area 1603 forces carriers deep within the N-well, below the STI diffusion area 1601 that separates the P-diffusion area 1604 and N-diffusion area 1603. In order for the diode to turn off, the injected carriers must first recombine. In modern IC processes, the crystalline defect density of N-well 1602 is very low. The lack of defect recombination center leads to long recombination time for injected minority carriers. LED 1600 has the characteristic that it will emit photos in an amount proportional to the RF electrical current through the diode junction. However, in a forward-bias mode, LED 1600 is too slow to respond to an RF electrical signal due to the reverse recovery time needed.

By contrast, when LED 1600 is reverse-biased, LED 1600 can respond almost immediately to an RF current, without a recovery time. The junction capacitance in reverse bias is small, and junction depletion region is also small. Carriers under high electric field generates hot-carrier current, which emits photons. Hot carrier light emission is usually in visible light spectrum. The resulting photons modulated at RF LO frequency are coupled on chip to the laser range finder APD.

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Thus, LED 1600 is well-suited to serve as LED 1406 in FIG. 14 (where LED 1406 is reverse-biased), but it is not well-suited to serve as LED 1506 in FIG. 15 (where LED 1506 is forward-biased).

FIG. 17 depicts LED 1700, which is an LED embodiment that can be used as LED 1406 in FIG. 14 or 1506 in FIG. 15, or as LED 902 in FIG. 9, LED 1014 in FIG. 10, and LED 1114 in FIG. 11. LED 1700 is a poly-defined diode comprising STI areas 1701, N-well 1702, N-diffusion area 1703, P-diffusion area 1704, and poly silicon gate 1705. Unlike in LED 1600, the carriers have a direct path between the P and N junctions, which significantly reduces the volume of silicon injected with carriers to recombine. Also, the conduction path is much closer to the surface of the silicon. This effect can be further enhanced by connecting the gate to the corresponding terminal to cause the bulk of the diode to invert. For example, in an N-well diode such as LED 1700, poly silicon gate 1705 can be connected to an N-junction terminal.

The use of a forward biased poly-silicon gate defined diode such as LED 1700 significantly simplifies the need to generate reverse bias voltage and bias network in the case of hot-carrier emission diode. A simple RF signal source 1403 or 1503 can be coupled directly to the poly-silicon gate defined diode 1700. A dedicated charge pump circuit is not required, nor is an RF coupling capacitor bias network required as is the case in a hot-carrier emission diode such as LED 1600.

A poly-defined diode such as LED 1700 in a forward-bias mode has much smaller volume of silicon injected with minority carrier compared to an STI diode. Only the small region of N-well in between P-diffusion area 1704 and N-diffusion area 1703 holds minority carriers. Also, this region is substantially close to the surface of silicon, which has recombination sites. Therefore, a poly-defined diode such as LED 1700 has a much faster reverse recovery time than an STI diode such as LED 1600.

On the other hand, a poly-defined diode such as LED 1700 is sensitive to reverse breakdown and are not suitable for emitting photons in response to an RF signal in reverse-bias mode. Poly-defined diode in forward bias will have carrier recombination current, which also emits photons. This photon light spectrum is near infrared and determined by the bandgap of silicon.

Thus, LED 1700 is well-suited to serve as LED 1506 in FIG. 15 (where LED 1506 is forward-biased), but it is not well-suited to serve as LED 1406 in FIG. 14 (where LED 1406 is reverse-biased).

Within the present disclosure, the word "exemplary" is used to mean "serving as an example, instance, or illustration." Any implementation or aspect described herein as "exemplary" is not necessarily to be construed as preferred or advantageous over other aspects of the disclosure. Likewise, the term "aspects" does not require that all aspects of the disclosure include the discussed feature, advantage or mode of operation. The term "coupled" is used herein to refer to the direct or indirect coupling between two components. It is to be appreciated that the term "lens" as used herein covers a set of lenses configured to perform the functions of the "lens".

The previous description of the disclosure is provided to enable any person skilled in the art to make or use the disclosure. Various modifications to the disclosure will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art, and the generic principles defined herein may be applied to other variations without departing from the spirit or scope of the disclosure. Thus, the disclosure is not intended to be limited to the

examples described herein but is to be accorded the widest scope consistent with the principles and novel features disclosed herein.

The invention claimed is:

1. A laser range finder comprising an integrated circuit, 5
the integrated circuit comprising:

a laser;

a shallow trench isolation diode operating in a reverse-
biased mode for outputting a first set of photons in
response to an RF local oscillator signal; and 10

an avalanche photo detector for generating an electrical
output in response to the first set of photons and a
second set of photons generated by the laser and
reflected off of a target.

2. The laser range finder of claim 1, wherein a first 15
terminal of the avalanche photo detector is coupled to a high
voltage DC bias signal through a first resistor.

3. The laser range finder of claim 2, wherein a second
terminal of the avalanche photo detector is coupled to an
amplifier through a second resistor. 20

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